

Flowers in the Lawn

Flowers belong in beds, or planters, or pots. They don't belong in turf grass stands.

Unfortunately, many of our early season broadleaf weeds like to 'show off' this time of year, growing rapidly and sending out flowers for all the neighbors to see. Two of the most troublesome this time of year are henbit and chickweed.

Henbit is the one with the little purple flowers. This very prolific plant is a common – and very noticeable – early emerging weed that seems to jump up and take over quickly. If you aren't sure you have henbit, check the stems. Henbit plants have square stems, rather than round.

Less common and typically less noticeable, but a problem just the same, is chickweed. It grows lower to the ground than henbit and can form a large, dense mat. Leaves are broadly elliptic to egg-shaped and pointed at the tip. It has round stems and tiny white flowers.

Despite their different looks, both are winter annuals, meaning they started growing back in the fall. They spend the winter as small plants, keeping them from being noticed until flowering in the spring. Once they flower, control with herbicides is usually a waste of time and money. Plants might be burned back by the herbicide application but they are rarely killed by spring herbicide applications. Instead, wait on hot weather to kill them off. Until then, keep the lawn mowed until nature takes its course.

That doesn't mean you should ignore them altogether. Instead, mark your calendar for implementation of a *fall* control program. Both weeds will typically germinate about mid-October. Application of a labelled product in late October to early November can go a long way toward eliminating these plants since they are small and relatively easy to control when they are less established. Choose a day that is at least 50 degrees F (herbicides will work at temperatures below 50 degrees but the weeds are killed at a slower rate). You may still want to consider spot treating in March to catch the few plants that germinate later, but a 'cleanup' operation will be a whole lot easier than trying to combat the dense mat that these weeds provide in the spring.

Commonly used products contain active ingredients like 2,4-D, dicamba, and carfentrazone. Examples include: 2,4-D, Weed-B-Gone, Weed Free Zone, Weed Out, or Trimec. As with any pesticide application always be sure to read and follow label directions.

Good lawn management practices can help as well. Make sure fertility levels

promote good grass growth. Don't mow too low, and try not to remove more than a third of the blade at any one time. An appropriate lawn management program can often be your best weed control program.